Jordan Brady Loewen-Colón (00:00:08):

Hello and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, fire keepers of the Haudenosaunee, the indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands. Now introducing your hosts, Phillip Arnold and Sandra Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold (00:00:31):

Hi, welcome back to Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery. I'm Phil Arnold. I'm a professor in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University, the founding director of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center, and president of Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm here along with my wife, Sandy Bigtree.

Sandra Bigtree (00:00:52):

Hi, I'm Sandy Bigtree and I'm a board member of the Indigenous Values Initiative and a founding member of the academic collaborative, Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center. I'm a citizen of the Mohawk Nation and welcome.

Philip P. Arnold (00:01:13):

Today we're very pleased to have a distinguished guest, the Dean of Hendricks Chapel at Syracuse University, Reverend Brian Konkol. Brian is someone who is very busy, extremely busy this time of year and has very graciously agreed to an interview on Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery. Reverend Brian Konkol has a PhD and serves as the Dean of Hendrix Chapel and professor of practice at Syracuse University. Brian is responsible for guiding, nurturing, and enhancing religious, spiritual, moral and ethical life at the university and across its extended community. As a member of Chancellor Kent Syverud's executive team, Konkol provides direct support and input for university-wide strategic initiatives and overall operations for the institution.

(00:02:08):

Konkol has a diverse and global background, including overseas ministry and service for nearly a decade while serving in South America and South Africa, is an ordained Lutheran minister, a faculty associate in the program for the advancement of research and conflict and collaboration or park at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, faculty chair of the Fellowship for emerging leaders in Ministry, an honorary associate professor in the School of Religion philosophy and classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Welcome, Brian to the show. I really appreciate you being on.

Brian Konkol (00:02:54):

Thank you so much, Phil. Thank you, Sandy, for the opportunity. Great to be with you.

Philip P. Arnold (00:02:58):

Now, for those of you who don't know, Brian has been a longtime collaborator on issues around indigenous peoples, particularly around the Haudenosaunee. And has been an advocate in many ways for Native American indigenous studies at Syracuse University. We've had many conversations about the Doctrine of Discovery and he's quite interested in the consequences of thinking about the Doctrine of Discovery. And what we'd like to do today is really just talk about the 10 religious themes or dimensions of the Doctrine of Discovery and how it contrasts with indigenous values. We recently put this up on our website, doctrineofdiscovery.org and it's been very helpful, a bit controversial on the website, and I

really wanted to ask Brian about these different religious themes. What I'll do is I'll read the introduction to the religious themes. It's a little long, but do you want me to read it? Do you want to read it?

Sandra Bigtree (00:04:04):

I don't care. Do you want me to read it?

Philip P. Arnold (00:04:07):

Yeah, why don't you read it?

Sandra Bigtree (00:04:08):

With issuance of 15th century papal bulls known as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, religion has been used all over the world, as a weapon against indigenous peoples and their land. This globalized, aggressive and destructive use of religion began here with the Vatican's justification for Portugal and Spain to raid West Africa and the Americas resulting in the near annihilation of traditions, ecosystems and human life. Today, this religious framework has been codified into law and utilized by multinational corporations to seize indigenous lands and extract resources. Religion therefore, is relevant today as foundational to social justice struggles and environmental destruction. To counteract this trajectory into the world, we call for a shift away from religion to an indigenous values as a way to understand and appreciate the sacredness of the earth, and its continuing spiritual material importance for all living beings, including the survival of human beings. The opposition between religion and indigenous values was created through the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. The indigenous peoples of the Americas were often gracious in welcoming newcomers until they realized that they had come to take possession of their bodies and lands.

Philip P. Arnold (00:05:47):

Great. I think that sets a context for what we're talking about here, and I think from my point of view as an academic, in the academic study of religion, it's a real contribution of the area of religion to think about these underpinning aggressive foundations of our world today. Even though we have spoken to lawyers and activists, indigenous people around the world in a variety of contexts, we really haven't talked to many people in religion. And Brian, you're an insider. You're a religious insider in some degree, but you also organize and manage a multi-religious, multicultural institution within the university setting, which is quite different than most religious leaders will say.

(00:06:46):

So, one of the first things I think I want to ask you about is the controversies around the multi-religious, the ecumenical movement, if you like because I know for example at places like the Parliament of World Religions where you have all these different religions coming together, that it sometimes is a controversial message for people who are fervently devoted to their own religious perspective, if you know what I mean. I wondered if we could maybe start there and think about plurality of religions versus the devotion to one's own religion.

Brian Konkol (00:07:30):

I appreciate the question. I think that Hendricks Chapel provides a wonderful context for us to enter into that conversation. One of the ways that I think about it is leaning into a priority of paradox that oftentimes we think of either or, either or either. And for me, coming out of the Lutheran tradition, there's a real embrace of the sense of paradox that things can be both and, and there's a number of

different examples for that. But that embrace of paradox of a both, and for me as a Lutheran minister helps me to also be the dean of a multi-faith chapel in a multicultural university. For example, one of the images we like to think about here at the chapel is the image of a tree and that a tree has both roots and reach. That it does not choose between its roots and its reach because it can't choose between its roots and its reach.

(00:08:28):

As a result of that, to personalize it for me, I don't think I have to choose between my Lutheran roots and my multicultural, multi-religious reach that both can nourish each other. That framework for me is helpful. It helps me to make sense of the context here and helps me to have conversations such as this one that, how is it that we can both honor and embrace the traditions that hold us literally and metaphorically during the storms of life and give meaning and purpose? But also, to not be afraid to reach and to have the branches, if you will, that help us to self-critique and explore. That paradox for me, helps to bring meaning and frame to our work here at the chapel.

(00:09:21):

Also, it helps me to bring meaning and purpose to my own personal, my own personal journey. We have 25 different groups that have very different belief systems here at the Chapel. Very, very, very different. My joke with people, we should be a Netflix sitcom. It is downright comedy most days of the different interactions that we have here. I think what we have shown to be true is that there can be very real fervent disagreement between and also real fervent cooperation and value of one another. It's a really special place to be. I feel a honored that Syracuse University has such a place. It allows us to have really important conversations such as this one.

Philip P. Arnold (00:10:12):

This leads into the first item in the 10 religious themes that is the assumed superiority of Christianity. Of course, in the 15th century among Christian monarchs in the Vatican, Christianity was unflinchingly assumed to be the superior religious formulation. They were at war with Islam, they were trying to retake the holy land. These are all considered enemies of Christ. That you can see actually operative today, it's not like it's disappeared. In this conversation of how one or how Christianity can be assumed to be superior over all other forms of Christianity, this is something that was part and parcel of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Sandra Bigtree (00:11:10):

It's foundational actually to the Doctrine of Discovery. How does that foundation affect this inclusivity that you now talk about?

Brian Konkol (00:11:23):

Yeah, it's a great question. I would take a step back. When I think about it, I think about the word conversion. Oftentimes, people think conversion is about me trying to make others Lutheran like me. Of course, there's hundreds and hundreds of years of history of those that would see conversion that way. But at its core, I would say conversion is about a radical reorientation. It's about reorientating, the ways in which we are connected with one another. I find that to be a helpful frame here. When we're talking about conversion here at Hendrix Chapel, it's not about one trying to make others like themselves. It's about trying to be connected in ways that are life giving, that are filled with justice and fairness and opportunity and so on and so forth. The image I like to share with people is that if someone punches me in the face, we're connected, but I'm not going to appreciate the nature of that connectivity.

(00:12:28):

So, it's not good enough to be connected. The question is how do we seek to be connected? And these different traditions, practices, what have you helped ride people of frame to be connected in a different way? To go to your question, I would argue that seeing oneself as superior, that to me, as a person of Christian faith is not the ways by which my own faith calls me to be connected with other people. I think there's always a third path in this particular frame where one can embody the values of the traditions they hold dear, and from that frame honor the traditions and values that other people come to the table. There's a long history of course, and your document alludes to this in terms of empire, in terms of economics, in terms of colonialism that I'm sure will touch upon in this conversation.

(00:13:23):

But to me, I try not to think about what is superior or inferior. I try to remind myself that just because something is different, it doesn't mean it's deficient. And my role is to try to faithfully embody the values that I've been taught to the best of my ability, and when I fall short, try to do better the next day. I think again, for me, I would argue that one of the ways that I see the beauties of our different faith traditions is how we can be connected in new ways, in ways that are just, in ways that are fair, in ways that honor those that are connected to us and we're connected to them.

Philip P. Arnold (00:14:09):

We're struck by all the ironies of the Doctrine of Discovery. I mean, you're utilizing language like conversion for example, other categories within Christianity that have been used in an opposite way or in way that is contrary to the way you want to enable them now. Actually, also, people have said to us in the past, "Well, what they practiced in the 15th century wasn't really Christianity, it was some other aberrant form." But for its almost entirety its whole history in a way, it was used to prop up monarchies and people in power. It was to justify all forms of violence and religious persecution. How do you as a Christian deal with the past, I guess, and how Christianity has been formed and utilized? I understand your own personal faith is quite different than what we're talking about. That's clear to me in word and deed with you. But how does that history of superiority, of violence, of colonialism, how does that square with what you have now? What you've inherited?

Brian Konkol (00:15:46):

It's a really great question. My own journey, as I've shared with many on this campus and beyond, I'll share. I grew up in a small town in central Wisconsin with a couple hundred people. Half of them were my cousins. So, we did not have, for the most part, an awareness of these longstanding issues, if you will, for hundreds and thousands of years. For me, a lot of it came from living overseas for 10 years. Number one, living in Guyana, formerly British Guyana, and confronted with colonial history, and also then living in South Africa and being clearly aware about the role of religion, both in terms of the apartheid regime, but also the role of religion and the anti-apartheid movement. So, it was eye-opening and it continues to be eye-opening. One of the ways I could say that I deal with it is, again, part of my own tradition is being very upfront about our own, shall we say, beauty and brokenness is humankind.

(00:17:00):

Again, another paradox for me is in the Lutheran tradition, we'd say humanity is both 100% beautiful and 100% broken at the same time. I actually believe that to be true. I think for me, it looks at the traditions of Christianity around the world and can be very wide-eyed about the significant injustices like my own Lutheran church, which has repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, which has come out with a social statement and document that... And I think that our theological formation gives us, shall we say, the courage to be very clear about our own mishaps and brokenness. So, I would say how I look at it is

number one, with great grief and mourning to think that a tradition that I am now a part of has done terrible things. I would say it also gives me pause to know that hundreds of years from now, people will be looking back at the things me and my contemporaries are doing and how it is that we're doing the right thing as the best we can.

(00:18:13):

I would say going back to the terminology, I do struggle with this often when people talk about all sorts of terms of the traditions that I hold dear in terms of religion, Christianity, conversion, mission. These are fraught terms. And I think there's a number of different ways that people want to go about it is some throwing those terms out. I try to be more of the belief of how do we reclaim some of these terms. It seems to be an uphill battle most of the time, but I'm just not ready to give up on some of these terms quite yet.

Philip P. Arnold (00:18:52):

Just as you're not willing to give up on your Christian heritage, your Lutheran Christian heritage, I think we've run into that quite a lot in this journey.

Sandra Bigtree (00:19:01):

And that bill is becoming a mountain. It's a real challenge today to try to live up to those values that you were brought up with and it was a very protected environment, it sounds like.

Brian Konkol (00:19:19):

Oh, perfect terminology.

Sandra Bigtree (00:19:22):

But it's good to see how reflective you've been of that and that you want to turn inward and try to help heal your traditions and recover.

Brian Konkol (00:19:36):

Sandy, you make a really good point. Can I say I loved your phrase, protected environment? I remind folks a lot here at the Chapel and in my own personal life, we wouldn't expect people to have a second grade understanding of mathematics and then flourish and function in the world. Unfortunately, and this is one of my critiques of congregational life, is that we often leave people with a second or third grade level of understanding when it comes to religion. And I think that we do see some of the negative consequences of that. So, I think your use of the word protected is really important. And I think as we grow older and have more experiences, we shouldn't be afraid to have that healthy critique of these traditions that we hold dear. It's actually one of the ways that we honor and respect our traditions is to receive critique. And that has been part of my journey here at Syracuse.

(00:20:33):

I'm not from central New York. To come into this place, and truly this place, and to learn more about the Haudenosaunee, the Onondaga Nation and so on and so forth. It has been eye-opening for me. So, it seems only appropriate to lean in to that conversation because we change our connections by changing our conversations. And on college campuses, we talk a lot about safe spaces, but I think a safe space should be a brave space and a brave space where we can have really honest, open conversations and serve our common good. So, I appreciate your comments, Sandy.

Sandra Bigtree (00:21:38):

But you do voice challenge with the limitations of what you were taught in your life, which were revealed to you [inaudible 00:21:47].

Jordan Brady Loewen-Colón (00:21:46):

Do you need help catching up on today's topic or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned? If so, please check our website at podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org for more information. Now back to the conversation.

Sandra Bigtree (00:22:01):

That involves the earth. It's not a textual learning but it's a learning by being integral in the earth and all the lessons are learned therein from those special relationships. So, it's ever-changing and it's very vibrant. And so it's a different sense of looking back. You're looking back to lessons learned, but these indigenous values are ongoing lessons learned daily as the natural world and all its diversity challenges your identity because you are connected to the earth. It's not hierarchical, it's not all knowing, no one's in charge of the world or on this ascension to a higher consciousness because the consciousness exists here, and being receptive to all living beings that engage your world. It's very different having these kinds of conversations because they're so different culturally.

Philip P. Arnold (00:23:08):

It's two ships in the night sort of. One of the things we talk about quite a lot is how religion can be seen as an ideology or something that exists between the ears, in a way or in the human heart even, but interior to the human being. But indigenous values are built from these relationships external. These life support systems that are involved with inter being communications, the life of the earth and that sort of thing. Sometimes religion, just the use of the word faith, faith traditions, that sort of puts the emphasis on the human being as maintaining that value system rather than the earth itself as somehow the container of these values that have to be constantly revealed. In history of religions, through the work of Mircea Eliade, and that's in these 10 themes. We use the word hierophany or the manifestation of the sacred in the world.

(00:24:22):

I think that is a good way to think about indigenous traditions, that always the world is revealing itself to human beings and through their relationship with other beings, other non-human beings. I think that in many ways religion gets that all backwards. We've been talking about hierarchy, we've been talking about the creation of a Christian empire in the past, and these are still very much with us in the culture today. There are these forces that really want, again, a Christian empire and they're at odds in many ways with democratic thinking or other kinds of thinking. I wonder if we could get into some of the more specific theological ideas that are in Christianity, and I think have fueled American Christianity in particular. I'm looking at apocalyptic thinking. Apocalyptic imagery that has largely driven the world of the explorers, the discoverers. The drive to save the world before the second coming. I'm wondering how you think about that now given that you're dealing with so much religious diversity.

Brian Konkol (00:25:55):

Wow. These questions are great. I feel like this should be part one of a 10-part series, you two. This is amazing.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:07):

I've got more.

Brian Konkol (00:26:08):

Apocalyptic thinking in two minutes or less. Okay, here we go.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:14):

Oh, you got five.

Brian Konkol (00:26:14):

Here is one of the things I'm reminded of is I love etymology and the study of words and terms and apocalyptic in my understanding has very little to do with the end of times and more has to do with the revealing of times. And that's really what that word, the revelation to John, it's the unveiling. One way I like to think about is that crisis gives birth to clarity. And when I think about the last few years of the pandemic, political dysfunction, climate change, so on and so forth, people would say, gosh, this feels like the apocalypse. And my admittedly flippant response is, yes, actually it is because things are being revealed to us in this moment and we have the opportunity to witness them, to observe them. In our own personal lives, we know this. When times are tough, it becomes very clear who our friends really are.

(00:27:14):

It becomes really clear what's important to us. When I think about apocalyptic thinking, and this might sound provocative, I embrace at its core what apocalyptic actually is supposed to mean. It's what is being revealed. And those are really hard conversations. What gets revealed about us? What gets revealed about our communities, our world? And to lean into that, shall we say, revelation. Going back to what you said earlier about our relationship to the earth. One of the things that become very clear to me, the world's going to get along just fine without humans. The world needs bees far more than it needs humans. So, I think that that humility can give us pause and that how it is we relate to the created order around us should give us some anthropological humility. I find that revelation to be really helpful.

(00:28:18):

Now, there's a number of different ways that we could go into why apocalyptic thinking in terms of the end times has been used and abused in terms of history, and we know this to be true. One of the things that I think about when it comes to the institution, if you will, of the church as an organizational entity is I'm a Lutheran, I'm a Protestant. I'm born from a tradition of protestors that recognize the importance to continue reforming and to continue revolutionizing, recognizing that anytime humans are involved in any organization, it's generally going to be disappointing and how it is that we are mindful of that and embrace that. And I would say continue to do our best to just wake up the next day and just try better.

Philip P. Arnold (00:29:17):

Yeah. The continual critique of Protestantism that really Luther set out in a way.

Brian Konkol (00:29:27):

I want to say something about that if I may. I'm convinced in this moment that as we've recently celebrated 500 years ago, the Reformation, and in the Lutheran Church, we had all these recent celebrations and important conversations. I wonder if 500 years from now, people will be speaking about this time in a similar way. This time of disruption, this time of aspiration, as of course, 500 years

ago, the printing press and bringing about numbers of ways to communicate. Thinking about right now with the internet and just this broad span of information, I have an inkling that 500 years from now, people will look back at this time as also a significant moment in which we are renegotiating how it is that we relate to one another. If it was called the Reformation, then I hope that we can call it the aspiration that we aspire to something better than what currently is. The great thing about making predictions 500 years from now is that I won't be here to validate whether or not it's happened.

Philip P. Arnold (00:30:39):

Just write it down, I guess

Brian Konkol (00:30:44):

This podcast will be available, so [inaudible 00:30:48].

Philip P. Arnold (00:30:55):

Your mention of the printing press brings up another big topic in Christianity, and that's biblical authority or literalism. We hear a lot about fundamentalism. We hear a lot about the literal authority of the Bible. And what you've been talking about is a different interpretive framework for the Bible, thinking about the Bible in a different way, in a way. I wonder what you think about that because I know you have to deal with fundamentalists. You deal with a variety of different Christians who have different relationships to the Bible and it's always... Going back to your comment about having a third grade education in religion, it seems to me that a lot of these people really ought to take a Bible class.

(00:31:55):

They ought to just get the basics of how the Bible was put together, who did it, for what reasons, in what languages. Those kinds of questions. Get at the problems of literalism. But from an indigenous point of view, that's maybe one of the big issues, the idea that you can take this book as somehow the literal, unfiltered word of God, that seems to me odd just in the face of it, but I want-

Sandra Bigtree (00:32:30):

It's the authoritative text.

Philip P. Arnold (00:32:34):

Exactly. I wonder what you have to say about that.

Brian Konkol (00:32:39):

Oh, again, I'll give you my quick answer now, and then in episode six of our 10-part series, I'll... It is hard, and I'll say this for me as a Christian, when you do look under the hood of the car, if you will, it is hard. And I do have compassion for those that crack open their understanding to realize that this book did not just drop from the sky and that there was a process, a political process as to which books were included in the canon and which were not. I understand that that's a challenging conversation for those, and it would just be easier to stay at a second grade level in many ways. I appreciate that. But for me, having an open, wide-eyed view and understanding of how it is that this sacred text was created through human hands, I do believe divinely inspired, nevertheless, having an opportunity... For example, literalism, my response to this is looking at, for example, half of the New Testament is Paul's epistles. And Paul's epistles are, we're reading someone else's mail.

(00:34:12):

This is Paul's letter to the so-and-so. I go, "We're committing a federal offense by reading someone else's mail." It just seems important when we're reading someone else's mail to have an understanding of who's writing it and who's receiving it. So, the question of how we read that just seems pretty foundational. On the other hand, what I also find really helpful... For example, I read the Psalms every single day, and I find it incredibly powerful how folks from thousands of years ago are writing about concerns and issues that feel like they're speaking directly to me in a very different context. I personally find that comforting and inspiring. I also think that taking a look at this text helps us to understand a long conversation around how it is that humankind has been trying to understand themselves, how to understand their image of the world, and for some trying to understand their picture of God.

(00:35:23):

So, I look at the Bible for me as a text that records the conversation that humans are having with God as they understand God to be, and the conversation that they're having between themselves. By entering into that conversation, I'm able to enrich my own ongoing conversation as well. I wouldn't say that it's from a sense of literalism and so on and so forth. I think that there's a way to honor the historical context of the ways in which these texts were written. And I would actually argue that the greater understanding we have of the historical context brings things to light in a different way. I guess that's my commercial for helping people to get beyond their third grade understanding and take courses in the religion department at Syracuse University.

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:19):

Exactly what I was getting to.

Brian Konkol (00:36:22):

There's my commercial.

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:23):

That's what I say, take more classes in religion. I always tell people that.

Sandra Bigtree (00:36:25):

At Syracuse University.

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:28):

At Syracuse.

Brian Konkol (00:36:28):

Right. That's right.

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:31):

With Reverend Brian Konkol.

Sandra Bigtree (00:36:35):

It's a more critical approach to understanding religion.

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:38):

That's right.

Sandra Bigtree (00:36:38):
Always interject that they're not training missionaries, or-

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:43):
Right. Exactly.

Sandra Bigtree (00:36:44):
[inaudible 00:36:45].

Brian Konkol (00:36:46):
You're right [inaudible 00:36:47].

Philip P. Arnold (00:36:47):
We won't ruin your you religion either. I think that's what-

Brian Konkol (00:36:53):
The critical point. Sandy, you're correct. Again, safe spaces are brave spaces, and I don't believe that we should be afraid to critique. Again, I'll go back to my own Lutheran tradition. Martin Luther was both the priest and a professor. My own tradition was born out of the academy. Part of that foundation is a commitment to not be afraid. To not be afraid to pursue knowledge and wisdom wherever that pursuit takes you. That's why, in part, many Lutheran traditions founded many Lutheran colleges and universities, is that we should not be afraid to seek truth, especially when that truth is contrary to our previous understanding. It's not about just a regurgitation or a reaffirmation of that which we previously known. It is a healthy critique to say, let's have honest, open conversations about our understanding. What I'm heartened by, especially here at Syracuse, is that this is an important conversation.

(00:38:08):
I feel like the conversation specifically around the Doctrine of Discovery, around indigenous values, around the land on which we find ourselves, it seems that this conversation has been picking up energy with great credit to the two of you and others. And it's an important conversation. I believe that the more we have the conversation, the more that it will change the ways that we're connected because it can't just be about conversation. It's renewed conversations, that changing connections, the ways that we are connected to indigenous people, indigenous values, and of course, the land on which we find ourselves. I've been inspired by that conversation here. It has undoubtedly given me great pause to reflect upon my own assumptions and my own shortcomings, and how that I show up as a religious leader and to do so with humility and to be part of the solution rather than just part of the problem.

Sandra Bigtree (00:39:09):
Oh, the conversation is definitely the first step and it is a beginning, but we still have this great divide being indigenous people, having this conversation about religion because we don't view our practices as being a religion. It's not contained in a book. Our way of life is embedded in our special reciprocal relationships to all living beings in the earth. So, we don't go back and read text. We perform the ceremonies of gratitude, and then it's revealed to us how we need to change or re-relate again in a new way to the earth and to those engaged in that regenerative power that every human being experiences.

There are a lot of walls and barriers to be broken down, to understand how to be a human being in this world.

Philip P. Arnold (00:40:18):

There are several other heavy conversation items in this list, and I'm going to list a couple of them. Original sin, the idea that Christians and others have this understanding that human beings are already in a fallen state. I'll mention another, so for future podcasts, but you might want to comment here, the presence of ultimate evil in the world. They both are connected in a way that they're cudgel that some Christian leaders will use to essentially scare people into this notion of personal salvation. I need to take care of just myself here, which has always struck me as a selfish reason to be religious. No, I need to be washed of my sins. I need to get out of this evil situation of the world. I wonder if you could comment on some of those items, huge items in Christian theology. I'm not expecting a lot in this five minutes or so.

Sandra Bigtree (00:41:53):

Well, people are obsessed with their own personal salvation because they've been taught that when they die, they will be forever bound to an eternal life in heaven or in hell. And that's pretty scary. It's a pretty scary lesson.

Philip P. Arnold (00:42:14):

Absolutely scary and-

Sandra Bigtree (00:42:15):

It's not going to be easy to turn people away from that totally immersive fear of their whole being. That they're going to be locked into this or that-

Philip P. Arnold (00:42:27):

For eternity.

Sandra Bigtree (00:42:27):

... heaven or hell for eternity.

Philip P. Arnold (00:42:28):

I don't know what eternity looks like but it's a long time, I know.

Brian Konkol (00:42:35):

Eternity sounds like a long time. I get asked about this often from students and others. And the best way I can describe it is I said, "Many have framed religion in general and Christianity, in particular, as organized fire insurance, where you do certain things and you pay a certain amount and it will prevent you from eternal health fire." I'm just not sure if that was the intention from the beginning. I think part of it's about helping people to look beyond what Martin Luther called navel-gazing. Looking inward at yourself to just see your faith or your religion as fire insurance. My understanding of religion, coming from [foreign language 00:43:28], ligament is about connectivity. Again, how is it that we relate with one another? So, when I think about original sin or the fall, as is often framed, I think about it less as a fall down and more of a fall apart.

(00:43:47):

The reality is that humankind does things each and every day that fractures community, that fractures our relationships with the earth, with generations that have come before us, and the generations that will come after us. That falling apart, if you will, call it sin, call it brokenness, call it whatever term that you want, but to me it is a reality. I do actually find it helpful to talk about, I'll use the term brokenness in that each and every day in my own life, I know I fall short, I make mistakes, and I do things that fracture community and how it is that we have an honest, open, wide-eyed look at what we need to do to heal and to bring together. I think you're spot on. There's no question that leaders over the course of time have used the fire insurance model to make a whole bunch of money and to do a whole lot of wrong.

(00:44:51):

There's no question that continues to this day. There's just no question about it. And part of my work that I'm trying to do is to look beyond the individualized, personalized values, as you said, selfish understanding and to look more outward and relational and how it is that we rethink the ways that we're connected and how it is... Not just with people, but also with the earth. I think that religion at its best, because I'm not willing to give up on it just quite yet, at its best, it's helping us to understand how it is that we can best connect with each other best, connect with the earth, connect with those who came before us, and connect with those who came after us.

Philip P. Arnold (00:45:33):

That's wonderful.

Sandra Bigtree (00:45:34):

No, it's commendable that you are involved in this work. But from indigenous perspective, this brokenness that you speak of was inflicted on our children in the boarding school system and the residential school system in Canada, and frankly all over the world in Australia and India. And it goes on and on and on. This was to just make a child just feel horrible about themselves and just bury them in fear of this dichotomy of heaven and hell, and it's terrifying. My own grandfather went to a boarding school, it's close. So, you had a very different upbringing than the people you're working with. That you're trying to engage in these conversations, it's quite daring of you to dive in and start these hard conversations because the pain is just immeasurable in native communities, indigenous communities all over the world. You can't understand who would do this to us. There's so much work and so much communication that has to move forward in this because you're more open than others, but there's still this enormous divide of communication. It's difficult.

Brian Konkol (00:47:09):

It is difficult. And I think the truth often hurts before it helps. When you're talking about boarding schools, and again, I'm talking about my time overseas, thinking about colonialism and the countless examples that we could give, Phil, you had mentioned earlier about those that wanted to say, well, that wasn't religion, that was something else. The reality is that many religious institutions knowingly or unknowingly have allowed themselves to be subjugated for these other uses. So, I think that that's part of that awareness that... I'm reminded of Mark Twain's quote, he said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but history rhymes." I really like that quote a lot.

(00:47:57):

I think by having an honest and open view of the past, and for me as a Christian and as a minister, how it is that the church has been used, willingly or unwillingly, for various purposes, helps us to be aware, honest, and open about the present and then the future. We see this over and over again from politics

to economics and so on and so forth. I think it's helpful, although painful, it is helpful to be aware of the hard truth of history to seek that truth of our history, and then to grow and to be better off for it. That's just where I'm at with it.

Philip P. Arnold (00:48:49):

That's great. We've been talking about individual personal salvation. And from that, I think can be derived another settler colonial value, and that is individualism. The sense that we are rugged individuals and we are all consumers, individual consumers on our own. This drives the global economy. It's one of those. I see its roots very firmly in religion, in settler colonial values. While you're bucking against that notion of individualism in your work, in your understanding of Christianity, it seems to be very much tied up with individual salvation. Really the creation of the global economy can be rooted in Christianity and globalism, I suppose. But also at a more personal level, this notion that I'm going to just get what I can out of this world, this extractive approach to the economy. After all, economy really just means a set of relationships that are sure that are [inaudible 00:50:28].

Sandra Bigtree (00:50:29):

I get what I can from my nuclear family that I'm right overseeing and in control of and trying to nurture. The whole system is so isolating and hierarchical.

Brian Konkol (00:50:44):

Yeah. I'm thinking about the work of Jürgen Moltmann, who talks about the classic, being created in the image of God. And for those of Christian faith, that's through the lens of the Trinity. It's the [foreign language 00:50:59]. This sense of I'm created in the image of God, I'm created in the image of the Trinity, which means I'm created in relationship. One of the ways that this was really highlighted for me was during my time in South Africa, the concept of ubuntu, this notion that I am because we are, or a person is only a person through other people. To take that even further beyond just humans, I am because we are. The fullness of creation and the created order, if you will.

(00:51:32):

It leans us into relationship. I really appreciate the pushback around this individualistic piece. I think that that is something, quite frankly, that's very regrettable. Not just about religious discourse in North America, but I would say common discourse in North America. I always find it fascinating that many languages around the world don't have translations to the words that we have with self as a prefix. The idea that you could be self-confident or self... It's just ridiculous. [inaudible 00:52:07].

Philip P. Arnold (00:52:07):

Self-help is an unheard notion.

Brian Konkol (00:52:09):

Yeah, it's ridiculous. I find that incredibly helpful to see a person is only a person through other people. How is it that our own existence is in service to the existence of others, the flourishing of others? That I am not well, unless others are well, the fullness of creation is well. So, my wellbeing and thriving and health is tied and tethered into the health and wellbeing of that around me. I actually think that that is at its core, part of the Christian message, is that for the fullness of the created earth and beyond. How it is that I as an individual am in service to that which is around me? I find it very regrettable that so much of it has been personalized because this selfishness, if you will, is destructive. I think at its best, religious

communities, faith communities, what have you, are meant to bring health, wellbeing, and fullness of life to that which exists outside of itself.

Philip P. Arnold (00:53:25):

Absolutely. It verges on the obvious. It just seems obvious. We gain sustenance from the world around us. We just had Thanksgiving. It makes sense that we're thankful for the animals and the plants and everything else that go into creating, literally creating who we are. We breathe, we drink water. It just seems obvious. And I think that's, that indigenous sensibility is quite obvious. But you see it in our students today. Our students, they all want to be influencers or something like that. They want to have a podcast. They want to be famous people in the world. That, to them, is their salvation in a way. It's rooted in a religious idea that creates this cultural form that I find is very hard. I think it's definitely part of the Doctrine of Discovery but how do we get at that?

Brian Konkol (00:54:41):

I know we're running out of time but I wanted to say this about... We talked at the beginning about where I grew up, and it's actually one of the reasons why I feel very, very fortunate to grow up where I did. The joke, of course, is when you grow up in a small town, if you don't know what you're doing, okay, because everyone else does. I grew up in an area where I knew exactly where my milk came from. It was from my neighbor, Keith. I know exactly who paved the roads. There was this sense of your neighbors, even though your neighbor lived two miles away, it was still neighbor. For me, that foundation continues to be very generative about, yes, the rights I have personally, but how those rights are ultimately about the responsibilities that I have towards others. Because as much as we like to think in this country that we are all born in log cabins, that we built ourselves, the, there's no such thing as a self-made human.

(00:55:53):

I was taught that growing up in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin, because I knew who those folks were, and I knew that my own livelihood was tied into theirs. Ultimately, I'm grateful to grow up where I did. And I think that that has continued to shape my own understanding through the travels I've been fortunate to have and now here at Syracuse that how are we helping our students to know that their diploma ultimately is not for them, their diploma is for others. It's an opportunity for them to serve others and to have really important conversations such as this one, to be honest and open about our own complicity and hardship, and then to do something about it. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to be here at Syracuse where we can invite others into that conversation and hopefully those conversations will help to convert the ways that we're connected with others and connected with the earth.

Sandra Bigtree (00:57:01):

Well, I'm backtracking just a little bit. You mentioned the Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost. That the core of Christian belief is rooted in that trinity, which is patriarchal. The Haudenosaunee have the word Skä•noñh, [foreign language 00:57:32], which means thank you for being well. It's the center we helped create. Sid Hill, [foreign language 00:57:40] of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy said, "You cannot attain peace and wellness until you are living in proper relationship with the natural world." And Mother Earth is matriarchal. It's a balancing of the patriarchy and the... Well, they're not even archies in Haudenosaunee language because there is no higher or lower, it's all like balanced, matrilineal, patrilineal. It's this balancing that you can only attain when you're in balance with the earth. This is another bigger jump for Christian theology to embrace the natural world as being a teacher. We're not in control of the earth. I guess with that said, we still have a lot of conversation needs to be followed here too.

Brian Konkol (00:58:37):

I look forward to it.

Philip P. Arnold (00:58:39):

Yeah. I really appreciate you, Brian, you've been a super important ally in so many ways. Not only to indigenous peoples here in Onondaga Nation territory, but also to us in this podcast, to the mapping of the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. And I just think your style, your way of working within Christianity, within Lutheranism is inspiring. It helps us all really reflect and be better at what we all do. I just want to say thank you and appreciate you.

Brian Konkol (00:59:24):

Well, thank you, Phil. Thank you, Sandy, for your important work. And for me personally, thank you for all the ways that you've continued to invite me into these important conversations. You've made me better. I'm just deeply personally grateful and I'm looking forward to continuing the conversation. So, thank you very much.

Jordan Brady Loewen-Colón (00:59:48):

The producers of this podcast were Adam DJ Brett and Jordan Brady Loewen. Our intro and outro is social dancing music by Orris Edwards and Regis Cook. This podcast has produced in collaboration with the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University Department of Religion, and the Indigenous Values Initiative.